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# California's Multiracial Population

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## Summary

Before Census 2000, Americans were asked to choose just one race when identifying themselves and their children. With the advent of the option to choose one or more races in Census 2000, there was a great deal of uncertainty about just how many Americans consider themselves to be multiracial. As with other issues related to racial and ethnic diversity, California is leading the nation—5 percent of the state's population is identified as being of more than one race, about twice the rate as in the rest of the nation.

In this issue of *California Counts*, we explore this newly identified population. We find that California's multiracial population is hard to characterize with any basic summary statistics. Overall, people who identify themselves as multiracial are younger, less educated, slightly more likely to be foreign-born, and more likely to be living in poverty than single-race Californians. However, multiracial Californians are of many racial combinations, with very different characteristics according to the particular combination. For example, the median age of individuals identified as both black and white is only 12 years, compared to 36 years for American Indian and white Californians. The poverty rates for individuals identified as Asian and white is less than half that of Hispanics who identify as both white and some other race.

For the most part, biracial Asian and whites, American Indian and whites, and black and whites have socioeconomic characteristics intermediate to those of their monoracial counterparts. However, both black and whites and Asian and whites are significantly younger than their monoracial counterparts, suggesting that the characteristics of the multiracial population could change as more and more children are born to parents of different races and potentially retain multiracial identity as they grow into adulthood and have their own children.

In the near term, the presence of this new multiracial option presents some challenges for the collection and analysis of demographic data at the state and national levels. We already see

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evidence that demographic rates calculated using different data sources can lead to implausible results for multiracial populations. Ultimately, the size and significance of the multiracial population of California will depend at least partly on future preferences with respect to identity. The ability to choose more than one race on state forms and future censuses along with increasing rates of intermarriage could lead more Californians to choose a multiracial identity. As the multiracial population grows, it has the power to challenge and even transform our understanding of race in California.

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## Introduction

Five percent of California's residents are multiracial, which is double the percentage recorded at the national level (2.4%), according to Census 2000. These 1.7 million multiracial Californians represent 25 percent of the nation's multiracial individuals. Thus, to understand who multiracial Americans are and what it means to identify as multiracial, it makes sense to start with California. Because Americans and Californians have only recently had the opportunity to officially state a multiracial identity (beginning with Census 2000), little is known about those who choose a biracial or multiracial identity.

An individual may be identified as being of more than one race for at least two reasons. Some individuals are identified as multiracial because they have parents or ancestors of different races. Other individuals are identified as multiracial because they do not believe that the standard single-race categories adequately describe their racial identity. Although we cannot distinguish between these two reasons in Census 2000 data, we can ask who multiracial Californians are and how they differ from those who have only chosen one race. Is there such a thing as multiracial identity? Will these new race options change the way we think about racial and ethnic identity in the future?

In this issue of *California Counts*, we examine multiracial identity in California and the rest of the nation, identifying which biracial categories are the most common, comparing the demographic characteristics of biracial Californians to those who choose only one race, and describing the socioeconomic characteristics of biracial Californians, including their political attitudes. We then conclude with a discussion of the future of race in California.[1]

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### The Census Question

During the debate about whether to allow Americans to identify themselves as multiracial, there were many different proposals for how to ask the question. Would people be asked to indicate which races they identified with or only to indicate that they were "more than one race" or "multiracial"? After much debate, it was decided that the same race question would be used as in past censuses, but that in Census 2000, people could choose as many race boxes as they wished, as shown in Figure 1.

As in the past, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and consequently the Census Bureau view Hispanic origin as an ethnic identity rather than a race. The result of this distinction is that census data collection methods consist of two related questions: a Hispanic ethnicity question and a race question. Question 5 records an individual's Hispanic ethnicity, if any, and Question 6 records races, instructing census respondents to "mark one or more races to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be." Hispanics may identify with any racial group or combination of groups.[2]

As shown in Figure 1, there are 15 race boxes on the census form. Asians, for example, are subdivided into Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Other Asians. Although there is no indication on the census form that someone who selects Filipino and Japanese will not be tabulated as multiracial, such respondents are tabulated as monoracial Asian for official tabulations. Or, for example, if someone checked the boxes indicating Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, and Other Pacific Islander, he or she would not be counted as belonging to four race groups, but rather would be tallied as monoracial Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI). Although Figure 1 outlines the broad racial categories,



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it does not specify who will be tallied as multiracial or how write-in responses are treated. If a respondent writes in an ethnic identity, he or she is often recoded into one of the five standard race categories (white, black, Asian, NHOPI, or some other race [SOR]). For example, those who write-in "Mexican" are recoded into SOR.[3]

## Multiracial Population Sizes in California and the United States

Numerically, California is clearly home to the greatest number of multiracial Americans of any state and has a disproportionately large multiracial population given its size (Table 1).

Other big states with large immigrant populations and diverse populations also have large numbers of multiracial residents (e.g., New York, Texas, and Florida). However, Hawaii, which has a very small total population (smaller even than California's multiracial population with only 1.2 million residents), has the fifth largest number of multiracial residents by state. Indeed, as a percentage of the population, Hawaii ranks the highest, with more than one in five residents identified as multiracial. California ranks third among states by the percentage of multiracial residents.

What races do multiracial Californians choose and in what proportion? How do the chosen races compare to those chosen by multi-

### Figure 1. Reproduction of Questions on Race and Hispanic Origin, Census 2000

→ **NOTE: Please answer BOTH Questions 5 and 6.**

**5. Is this person Spanish/Hispanic/Latino? *Mark* [X] *the "No" box if not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino.***

- ☐ No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Yes, Puerto Rican
- ☐ Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
- ☐ Yes, Cuban
- ☐ Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino — *Print group.*

**6. What is this person's race? *Mark* [X] *one or more races to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be.***

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black, African Am., or Negro
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.*
- ☐ Asian Indian
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Native Hawaiian
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Guamanian or Chamorro
- ☐ Filipino
- ☐ Vietnamese
- ☐ Samoan
- ☐ Other Asian — *Print race.*
- ☐ Other Pacific Islander — *Print race.*
- ☐ Some other race — *Print race.*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 questionnaire.

### Table 1. Top Five States Ranked by Number and Percentage of Multiracial Residents, Census 2000

| Rank | Number Multiracial (millions) | | Percent Multiracial | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | California | 1.6 | Hawaii | 21.4 |
| 2 | New York | 0.6 | Alaska | 5.5 |
| 3 | Texas | 0.5 | California | 4.8 |
| 4 | Florida | 0.4 | Oklahoma | 4.5 |
| 5 | Hawaii | 0.3 | Nevada | 3.8 |

Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 1% Public Use Microsample (PUMS).



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racials nationwide? Where is the multiracial population located throughout the state and how does this vary by multiracial group? Do California's multiracial individuals differ in any substantive way from their monoracial counterparts in their demographic or socioeconomic characteristics? The following sections of this report address each of these questions in turn.

## Choose Which Two? California's Multiracial and Ethnic Composition

The majority of Californians who checked more than one race on the Census 2000 form chose just two races. Indeed, less than half a percent of Californians indicated being of three or more races (0.3%). Five biracial combinations account for more than 71 percent of all the state's multiracial population (see Text Box 1 for a guide to race conventions used in this report).

The most common multiracial group is Hispanics who are identified as both white and SOR (see Table 2).

California's next most common multiracial group is non-Hispanic SOR+white. This differs from the national ranking where non-Hispanic AIAN+white is the second most common multiracial category. In California, the non-

### Text Box 1. Key to Abbreviations and Usage

**Race categories and abbreviations for single-race groups**
White = white
Black = black or African American
Asian = Asian
AIAN = American Indian and Alaska Native
NHOPI = Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
SOR = some other race

Multiracial = person belonging to more than one of the above six groups.

Biracial = person belonging to two of the above six groups.

**Conventions for population of Hispanic origin**
The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably throughout the text. Both terms refer to the same demographic group.

**Conventions for referring to the population of multiracial Americans**
A "+" sign is used throughout the text of this report when referring to individuals identified as more than one race. For example, a person who marked the checkbox for white and for Asian is referred to as Asian+white.

Because Hispanic ethnicity is a separate census question, a person who checked any Hispanic ethnicity in Question 5 and two or more races in Question 6 would be a Hispanic multiracial individual. For example, a person who is Hispanic and checked both white and SOR would be referred to as Hispanic SOR+white.

**Conventions for referring to the race(s) of married couples**
A "/" is used throughout the text of this report when referring to the racial identification of married couples. For example, a couple in which one partner is black and the other partner is Asian is referred to as a black/Asian couple. If one partner is multiracial, black+Asian, and the other partner is white, the couple would be designated black+Asian/white.



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Hispanic Asian+white group also outnumbers the non-Hispanic AIAN+white group. As in the country as a whole, non-Hispanic black+whites are the fifth most common biracial group. In the remainder of this report, all races without "Hispanic" preceding them are non-Hispanic.

Overall, monoracial groups are the most common in California, with whites, Hispanic SORs, Hispanic whites, Asians, and blacks composing the top five racial groups and over 93 percent of California's population (Table 3).

However, three biracial groups—Hispanic SOR+white, SOR+white, and Asian+white—rank sixth, seventh, and eighth, respectively, and each above single-race AIANs. The five most common biracial pairings each vary tremendously in their size relative to their monoracial components. For example, the number of black+whites is less than 5 percent of the size of the black population (and a much smaller share of the white population). On the other hand, SOR+whites number more than three and a half times the size of the monoracial population of SORs. Asian+white Californians are approximately 6 percent of the size of the monoracial Asian population. The size of the Hispanic SOR+white population is approximately 11 percent of each the Hispanic SOR and the Hispanic white population. Finally, the AIAN+white population is over

**Table 2. Most Frequent Biracial Combinations, California, Census 2000**

| California Rank | Biracial Group | California Population Size | Percent of California Population | National Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hispanic, SOR+white | 483,982 | 1.4 | 1 |
| 2 | Non-Hispanic, SOR+white | 238,473 | 0.7 | 4 |
| 3 | Non-Hispanic, Asian+white | 232,106 | 0.7 | 3 |
| 4 | Non-Hispanic, AIAN+white | 153,982 | 0.5 | 2 |
| 5 | Non-Hispanic, black+white | 91,888 | 0.3 | 5 |

Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 5% PUMS.

**Table 3. Top 15 Racial and Ethnic Categories in California, Census 2000**

| Rank | Category | Number | Percent of California Population |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | White | 15,787,039 | 46.6 |
| 2 | Hispanic SOR | 5,640,156 | 16.6 |
| 3 | Hispanic white | 4,339,673 | 12.8 |
| 4 | Asian | 3,661,295 | 10.8 |
| 5 | Black | 2,161,542 | 6.4 |
| 6 | Hispanic SOR+white | 483,982 | 1.4 |
| 7 | SOR+white | 238,473 | 0.7 |
| 8 | Asian+white | 232,106 | 0.7 |
| 9 | AIAN | 188,221 | 0.6 |
| 10 | AIAN+white | 153,982 | 0.5 |
| 11 | Hispanic AIAN | 129,425 | 0.4 |
| 12 | NHOPI | 94,925 | 0.3 |
| 13 | Black+white | 91,888 | 0.3 |
| 14 | Hispanic black | 70,231 | 0.2 |
| 15 | SOR | 67,280 | 0.2 |
| | Other | 544,448 | 1.6 |
| | Total | 33,884,660 | 100.0 |

Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 5% PUMS.
Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding; categories are exclusive by race and ethnicity (e.g., "white" refers to non-Hispanic whites).



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80 percent of the size of the monoracial AIAN population.

The SOR race category merits further discussion here. The inclusion of the SOR category among the standard single-race categories allows the Census Bureau to enumerate those who do not identify with the racial categories that the census employs. The majority (97%) of those who select SOR alone were Hispanic (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001, Tafoya, 2003). Among all who identify as SOR+white, two-thirds identified as ethnically Hispanic. The non-Hispanic third of this group reported an array of different ancestries including Armenian, Iranian, Italian, Portuguese, Arab, Irish, German, and Egyptian, on a separate census question that elicits ancestry. The identity of these respondents may reflect mixed parentage, an understanding of race at odds with census categories, or an ancestry that is nominally white but an experience in the society at large as only marginally white. For this latter group, it is difficult to argue that they share a racial identity given the diversity of ancestries that they acknowledge, but they clearly share a preference for avoiding the standard monoracial categories, including monoracial SOR.

There is some question about how consistently these individuals identify as multiracial. In Text Box 2, we discuss the degree of variation in racial identification for multiracial Americans.

## Text Box 2. Consistency in Racial Reporting

Racial identification is not immutable. Even for the same individual, it can change with context, over time, and even according to the format and order of questions on surveys. Among multiracial individuals, consistent reporting of multiracial identity is quite low. For example, among non-Latinos who reported two or more races in Census 2000, only 40 percent responded by offering the same response in a follow-up survey conducted by the Census Bureau. Of the 60 percent selecting only one race in the follow-up, most selected white. Seventy-five percent of non-Latino biracial Americans identifed as at least partly white in Census 2000. Consistency in racial reporting is lower among multiracial Latinos: Only 22 percent of Latinos who identified as multiracial in Census 2000 also reported two or more races in the Census Bureau's follow-up. More than 29 percent selected SOR alone, and even more—43 percent—selected white alone. The two multiracial groups that were most consistent in their reporting of race across the two data collection efforts were Asian+whites and black+whites (Bennett, del Pinal, and Cresce, 2003).

In the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)—a survey conducted by telephone—multiracial respondents were asked which race they most identified with. When asked to choose one race, black+whites were more likely than any other biracial group studied to choose a nonwhite response. Among black+whites, almost half chose black or African American, only 18 percent chose white, and one-third chose something else (including multiracial, but this response cannot be separated from the others). Among Asian+whites, 42 percent selected white, 29 percent chose Asian, and 29 percent chose something else. Among AIAN+whites, the vast majority identified with white (75%). Many fewer AIAN+whites than Asian+whites or black+whites—9 percent—persisted in choosing something else (including multiracial). Because "other" was not read as one of the racial responses in the CHIS survey, very few Latinos identified as SOR+white in the CHIS.



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## Where Are Those Who Choose More Than One Race?

Within California, multiracial residents are distributed somewhat unevenly, with higher proportions in some of the state's rural and smaller metropolitan counties, in addition to some of the state's urban counties (Map 1).

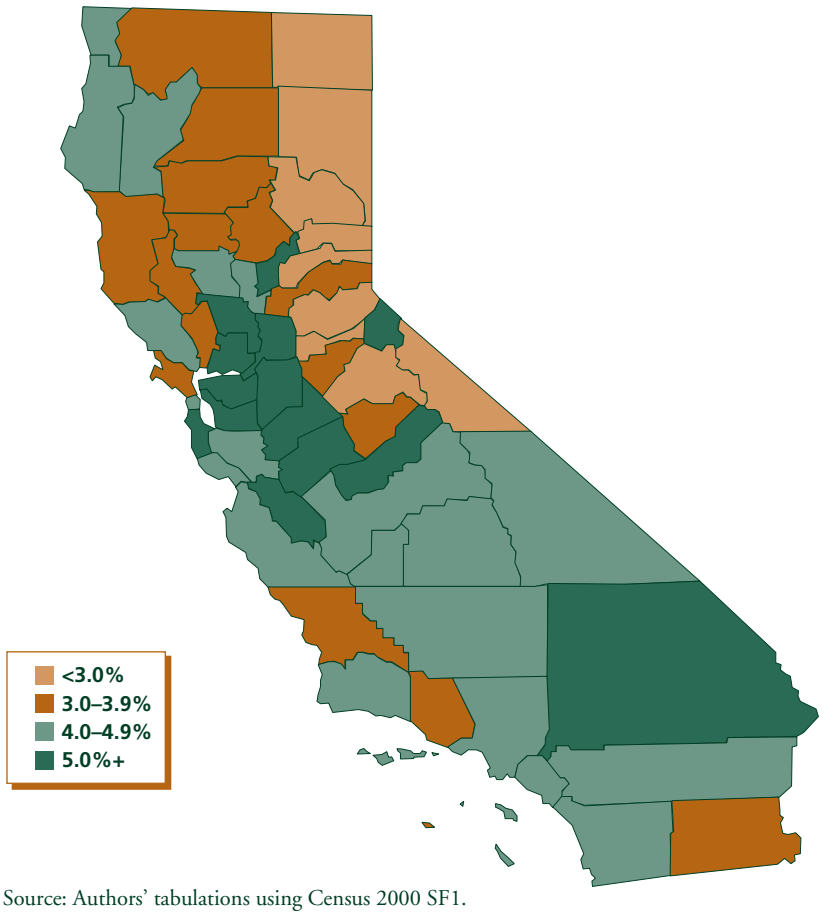
The majority of the state's most multiracial counties (those with more than 5 percent multiracial residents) are in the northern San Joaquin Valley, the Sacramento region, and the Bay Area. Sacramento County is the largest urban county that ranks high in the share of its residents that are multiracial (5.8%). Earlier research on births to mixed-race couples in California also found that these births were more likely in Sacramento County than in other regions of the state (Tafoya, 2000). Solano County has the highest percentage multiracial residents, with 6.4 percent.

What is especially notable about California's multiracial population is how few of the state's 58 counties have less than 3 percent of their population that is multiracial (recall that the national average was 2.4%). Indeed, only Mono County has a lower proportion of its residents that are multiracial than the national average (2.2%). The six most multiracial cities in the state each have multiracial population shares of 7 percent or higher (Table 4).

More than 10 percent of Southern California's Glendale population is multiracial, as is over 7 percent of the population in a number of cities in the wider San Francisco Bay Area (Hayward, Fairfield, Pittsburg, South San Francisco, and Antioch). In Glendale, most multiracial residents are SOR+white, with ancestry data indicating many of Armenian descent. Newport Beach, in Southern California, has the lowest percentage of multiracial residents (1.7%).

Because Hispanic SOR+whites are the most common multiracial group statewide, they also tend to dominate the multiracial population in any given locale. When

**Map 1. Percentage Multiracial, by County, Census 2000**




Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 SF1.



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**Table 4. California's Most and Least Multiracial Cities, Census 2000**

| Most Multiracial | | Least Multiracial | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Percent | | Percent |
| Glendale | 10.1 | Newport Beach | 1.7 |
| Hayward | 7.5 | Thousand Oaks | 2.8 |
| Fairfield | 7.4 | Encinitas | 2.9 |
| Pittsburg | 7.2 | Carlsbad | 3.0 |
| South San Francisco | 7.0 | Yorba Linda | 3.1 |
| Antioch | 7.0 | Cupertino | 3.1 |

Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 5% PUMS.
Note: The table includes cities with at least 50,000 residents.

**Table 5. Multiracial Populations in California's Ten Largest Cities, Census 2000**

| | City Population | Multiracial Share of City (%) | Largest Multiracial Group |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sacramento | 407,018 | 6.4 | Hispanic SOR+white |
| Long Beach | 461,522 | 5.3 | Hispanic SOR+white |
| Los Angeles | 3,694,820 | 5.2 | Hispanic SOR+white |
| Fresno | 427,652 | 5.2 | Hispanic SOR+white |
| San Jose | 894,943 | 5.0 | Hispanic SOR+white |
| Anaheim | 328,014 | 5.0 | Hispanic SOR+white |
| Oakland | 399,484 | 5.0 | Hispanic SOR+white |
| San Diego | 1,223,400 | 4.8 | Hispanic SOR+white |
| Santa Ana | 337,977 | 4.6 | Hispanic SOR+white |
| San Francisco | 776,733 | 4.3 | Asian+white |

Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 5% PUMS.

**The six most multiracial cities in the state each have multiracial population shares of 7 percent or higher.**

we examine California's ten largest cities (Table 5), we find that Hispanic SOR+whites are the most common multiracial group in nine of them.

San Francisco, California's tenth largest city, is the one exception, where Asian+whites are the most common multiracial group. Los Angeles, the largest city in the state, has the greatest number of multiracial individuals of any city statewide, and this is true for each of the five most common biracial groups.

## Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Multiracial Californians

In the remainder of this issue of *California Counts*, we focus on the five most common multiracial responses among Californians (those listed in Table 2) and compare their characteristics to those of their monoracial counterparts.



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Here, we examine nativity and age distributions, then turn to socioeconomic characteristics.

Multiracial Californians are slightly more likely than monoracial Californians to be foreign-born (28% versus 26%). However, this varies from one biracial group to the next. Black+whites are less likely to be foreign-born than either whites or blacks, as are AIAN+whites relative to AIANs and whites, and Hispanic SOR+whites relative to Hispanic whites and Hispanic SORs (Figure 2).

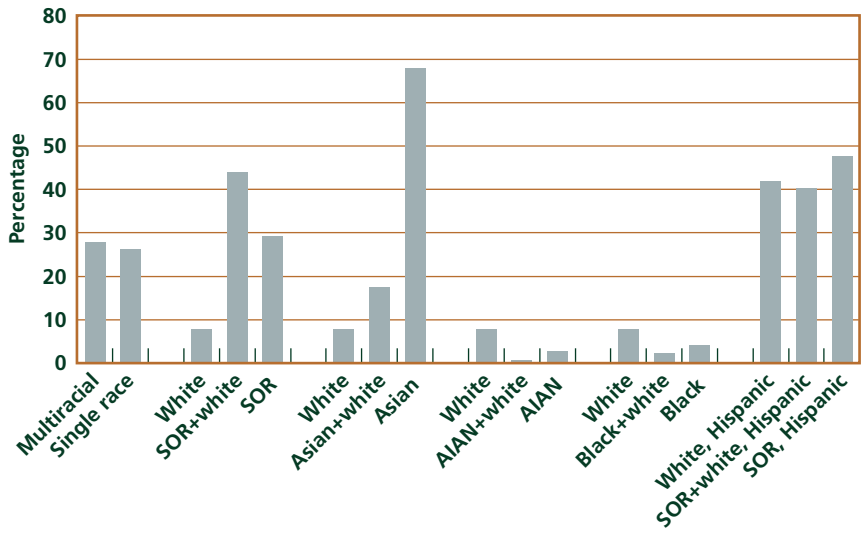
Asian+whites are much less likely than Asians, but more than twice as likely as whites, to be foreign-born. SOR+whites are five and a half times more likely than whites and one and a half times more likely than SORs to be foreign-born, and this group is largely responsible for the higher share of foreign-born overall among the multiracial population than among the monoracial population.

Multiracial individuals, as a group, are younger than their monoracial counterparts. Of the 6.8 million Americans who reported more than one race, 42 percent were under age 18, compared to only 25 percent for monoracial Americans (Jones and Smith 2001). In California, we find that multiracial people have a median age ten years lower than that of the monoracial population (24 versus 34) (Figure 3). The most striking age difference is the relative youth of black+white Californians, who have a median age of 12, compared with over age 30 for either monoracial blacks or monoracial whites, suggesting that the multiracial identities among this group are being taken up primarily by the very young, as reported by their parents.[4]

Asian+white biracial individuals are also quite young relative to both white and Asian monoracial groups, with a median age of 18. Both AIAN+white and SOR+white median ages fall between those of each monoracial group. Hispanics as a group are relatively young, and because Hispanic SOR+whites constitute the largest multiracial group (nearly 0.5 million), they contribute strongly to the overall age structure of the broader multiracial population. Age differences by gender within each biracial category are few and small, but, on average, females appear to be the same age or a year or two older than their male multiracial counterparts (not shown). These differences are examined more closely in age pyramids for the two biracial groups with the youngest median age (black+white and Asian+white) as well as their corresponding monoracial groups (Figure 4).

The population pyramid for black+whites is striking in its youth relative to either whites or blacks. Indeed, it resembles the population pyramids found in developing countries, where birth rates and mortality rates are high.

**Figure 2. Percentage Foreign-Born, Census 2000**




Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 5% PUMS.



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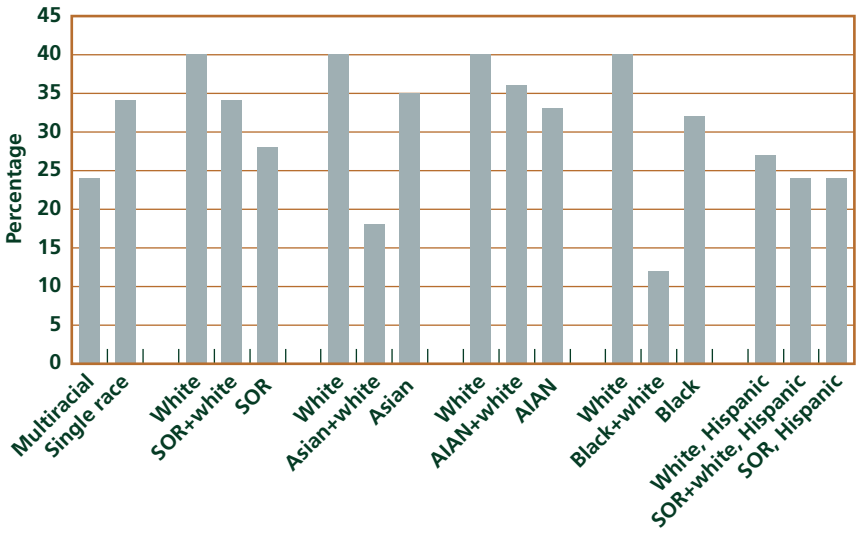
**Figure 3. Median Age, Census 2000**




Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 5% PUMS.

The population pyramid for Asian+whites is similar, although the decline in population size at older ages is not quite as dramatic as that for black+whites.

Other forces than fertility and mortality are shaping the extreme population pyramids observed for Asian+whites and black+whites. First, to the extent that interracial couples are more common recently than in the past, the biracial offspring of these couples will be relatively young. Indeed, the share of all births that are to mixed-race couples has increased approximately 40 percent in the last 20 years in California, from 5.3 percent in 1982 to 7.4 percent in 2001 (Tafoya, Johnson, and Hill, 2004). Second, younger individuals and their parents might feel less constrained by traditional racial categories that have historically forced people to choose a single racial identity. However, these children and their parents may realize later from experiences in school and in the world at large that they are perceived as monoracial. This may cause these children or their parents to switch to a monoracial identity as the children age. Indeed, the steepness of the sides of the black+white population pyramid relative to the Asian+white pyramid suggests that more black+white children over the age of ten are identifying as monoracial. When multiracial Californians were asked to select their preferred monoracial category, many more

**Because interracial couples are more common recently than in the past, the biracial offspring of these couples will be relatively young.**

black+white respondents chose black than white, whereas among Asian+whites, many more chose white than Asian (authors' tabulations from the CHIS, 2002). Finally, many parents of older children may not avail themselves of the opportunity to check more than one box on the Census 2000 form because they have had to choose just one race box on so many other forms in the years since their children were born.

Overall, the multiracial adult population (age 25 and older) is slightly less educated than the monoracial population (Figure 5). However, for most groups of biracial Californian adults, the level of educational attainment is between that of their component monoracial groups.

For example, black+whites tend to be better educated than blacks but less educated than whites. The percentage of these populations with less than a high school education is 10 percent for whites, 13 percent for black+whites, and 19 percent for blacks. Likewise, 34 percent of whites have a



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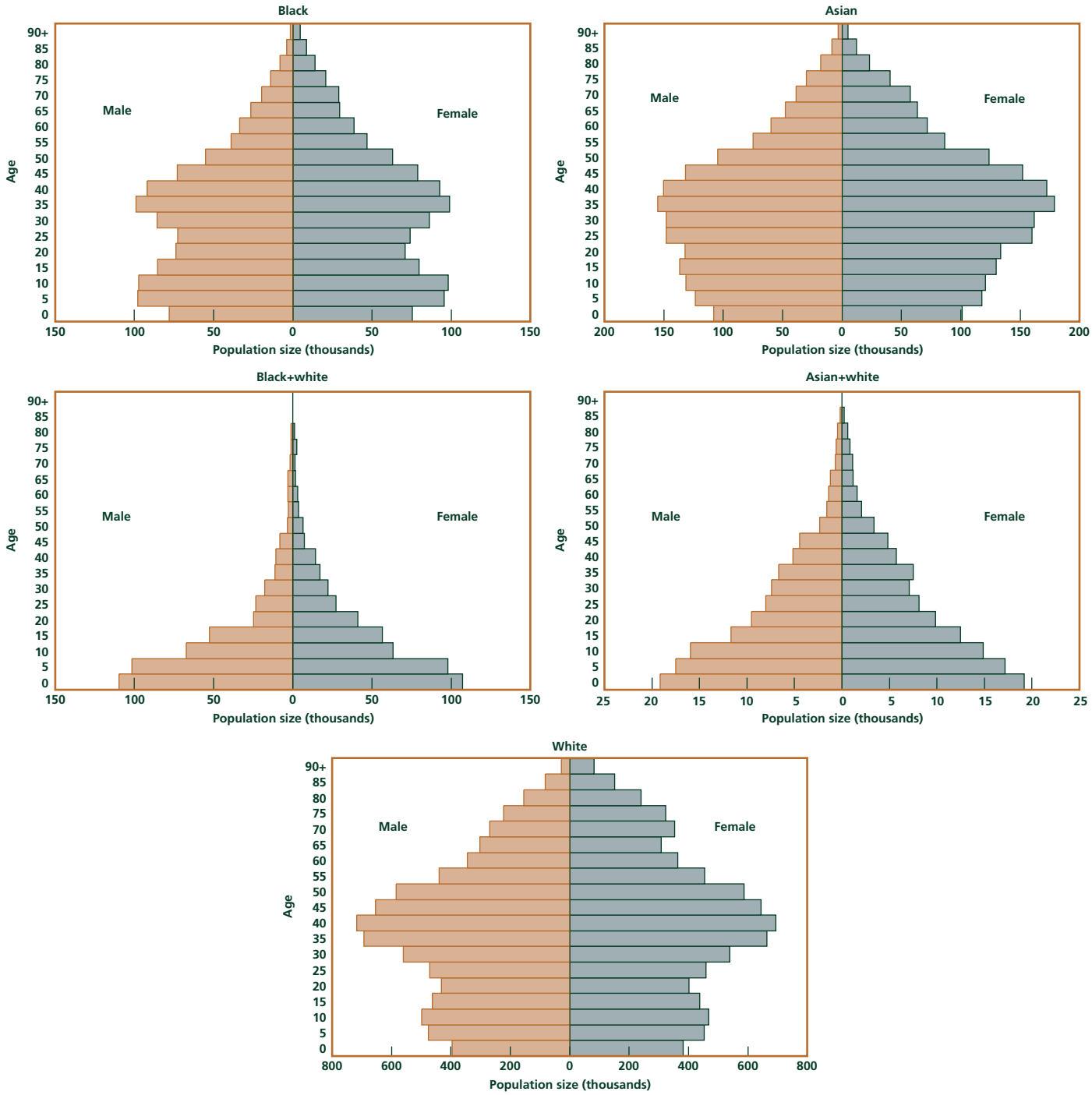
## Figure 4. Population Age Pyramids, Census 2000




Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 5% PUMS.



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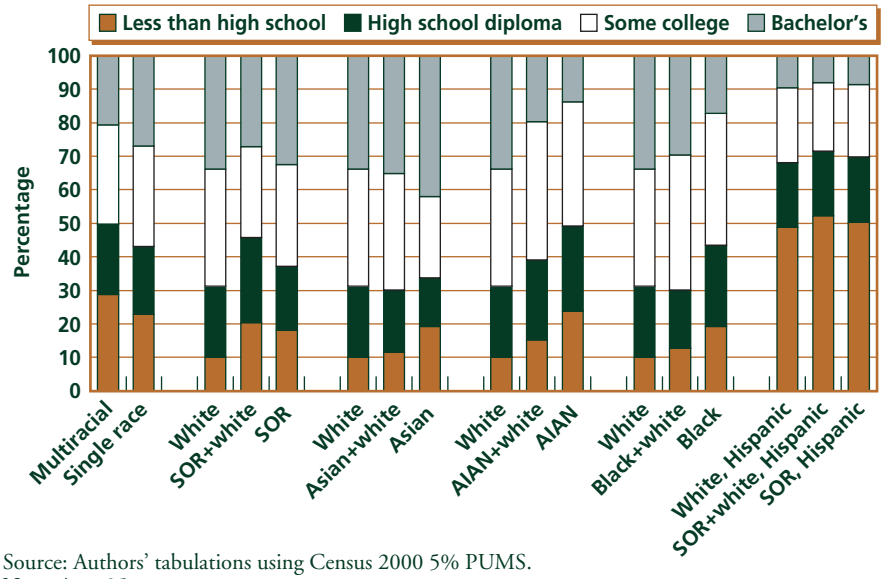
**Figure 5. Educational Attainment, by Racial Group, Census 2000**




Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 5% PUMS.
Note: Ages 25+.

bachelor's degree; among black+whites, 30 percent are in this category, and among blacks alone, only 17 percent have attained at least a bachelor's degree. The same pattern prevails when comparing white, AIAN+white, and AIAN groups. Whites show the highest educational attainment, AIAN+white biracials are intermediate, and the AIAN group has the lowest educational attainment. In the comparison of whites to Asian+whites and Asians, the biracial group is again intermediate although very similar to whites; however, the monoracial Asian group has the highest level of educational attainment, whereas whites have the lowest educational attainment of the three groups.

Both Hispanic SOR+whites and non-Hispanic SOR+whites are less educated than either of their monoracial counterparts. Differences among Hispanic SOR+whites, Hispanic whites, and Hispanic SORs are slight, however, and those among SOR+whites, SORs, and whites are substantial. Fifty-four percent of SOR+whites attended college versus 69 percent of whites and 63 percent of SORs.

To measure economic well-being, we examined poverty rates for all ages of multiracial Californians. As with educational attainment, we found that Californians identified as multiracial are slightly worse off than are monoracial Californians (17% versus 14% poor) (Figure 6).[5]

**We find that multiracial people have a median age 10 years lower than that of the monoracial population (24 versus 34).**

These high poverty rates can be at least partly attributed to a generally young age structure and a relatively high share of foreign-born individuals in the state's multiracial population. In California, poverty rates tend to be higher for households with children than for households without children (Reed, 2004). Immigrants tend to have lower earnings and thus higher poverty rates than U.S.-born residents of the state (Reed, 2004).

However, poverty rates vary widely between the largest multiracial groups. For example, poverty rates for Asian+whites are less than half those of SOR+white Hispanics (8% versus 22%) and are substantially lower than the state poverty rate. With one exception, poverty rates for biracial groups are intermediate between those of their monoracial components. For example, black+white poverty rates are halfway between the relatively low rates of whites and the relatively high rates of blacks. The one exception is among the SOR+white biracial group, with that multiracial group experiencing higher rates of poverty than either



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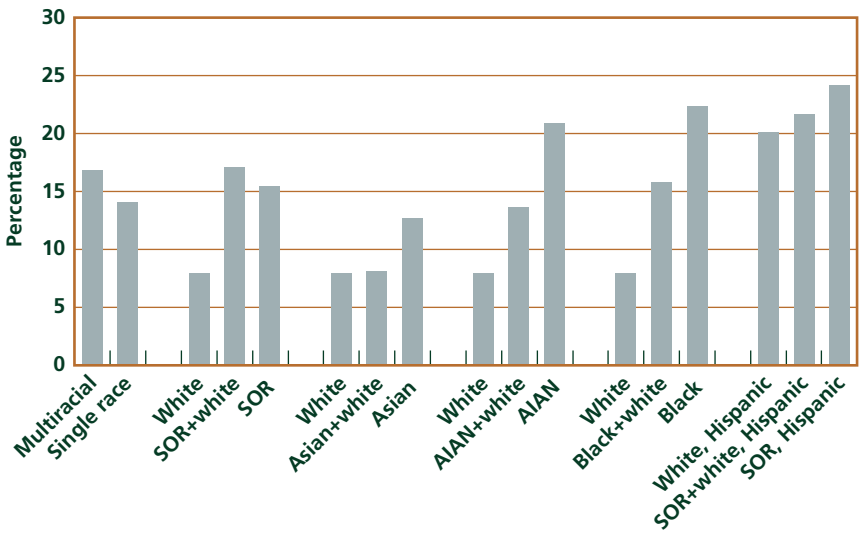
**Figure 6. Poverty Rates, Census 2000**




Source: Authors' tabulations using Census 2000 5% PUMS.

of its monoracial components. As noted above, this group is more likely than either monoracial whites or SORs to be foreign-born.

## Political Attitudes and Participation

Several groups, such as Arab-Americans, advocated for recognition in Census 2000, but without a doubt multiracial groups were the most successful. Does this recognition reflect an engaged and highly political population?

Since the census does not include questions about political participation or beliefs, we turned to a telephone survey of more than 2,000 randomly selected California adults to learn about the political views and activities of the multiracial population (Baldassare, 2000). In addition to identifying themselves as belonging to one of the standard race categories, the survey respondents were asked to indicate if they had ever identified as "mixed race." Approximately 14 percent indicated that they had. We also know which race they primarily identify with when asked to choose just one.

Using the survey results to compare multiracial adults to monoracial adults, we found few differences in political attitudes and participation. Those small differences that do stand out suggest that the multiracial population is slightly more liberal and more likely to be registered as Democrats and Independents and less likely than the monoracial population to be registered Republicans.

However, we generally found that multiracial groups have more in common with their monoracial peers than with other multiracial groups. The variation between the multiracial groups is almost as large as the variation between the monoracial groups. For example, most multiracial individuals are slightly less likely than their single-race counterparts to be registered Republican (Figure 7).[6] Multiracial blacks, however, are more likely than single-race blacks to be Republican.

Multiracial Californians appear to be less engaged in the political process in general, although these differences are very slight. Adults who have ever identified as multiracial are slightly less likely than those who have not to be registered to vote. Multiracial adults are less likely than adults who have never identified as multiracial to say that they vote "always" or "nearly always."[7]

In general, rather than being a politically engaged force, multiple-race individuals are not more likely to vote, nor do they appear to share the same political leanings. Although they are slightly more likely to be liberal leaning overall, this is not universally true (e.g., multiracial blacks).



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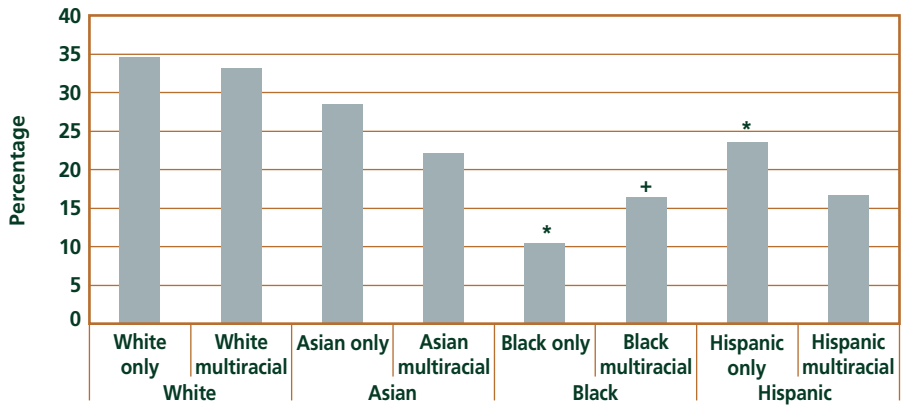
**Figure 7. Percentage Registered as Republican Among Single-Race and Multiracial Individuals**




Source: Authors' calculations from Baldassare (2000).
Notes: Simulation controls for age, education, and nativity. Noncitizens are excluded.
* Significant difference at the 1 percent level between the group and white.
+ Significant difference at the 1 percent level within the group between mixed and single race.

## Implications

With the advent of the new race question on the census, we are finally able to gather data which allows individuals to state their identity in more detail and thus helps us understand the complexities of racial identification. Changes in census racial and ethnic categories have important implications for our understanding of population change and issues associated with population counts. These issues include redistricting, civil rights enforcement, and the determination of population-based rates (including vital statistics, such as mortality and fertility rates). In this section, we discuss some of these implications.

Because racial categorizations between Census 1990 and Census 2000 are not consistent (with the addition of the ability to choose more than one race in 2000), analyzing changes in racial populations from one census to the next is difficult. The same problem exists in other datasets, such as the Current Population Survey, which modified its racial and ethnic categories to allow more than one race beginning in 2003. The severity of the problem depends on how many people choose to identify as being of more than one race and the extent to which these people differ from monoracial respondents. For most groups, the problem is neither too extensive nor too severe (Table 6). For example, the proportion of multiracial whites among all whites is small: 4 percent in California; and the characteristics of these multiracial whites are not so different from the characteristics of monoracial whites.

However, for American Indians, the problem is severe. The most important and basic temporal measure of any population—change in its size—is in serious doubt. Census 2000 counted 178,984 non-Hispanics who identified only as American Indian, and 383,197 who identified as either American Indian alone or AIAN multiracial. Census 1990 identified 184,065 non-Hispanic American Indians (Census 1990 Summary Tape File 1). The higher count suggests that the American Indian population more than doubled between 1990 and 2000, whereas the lower count suggests a declining population among American Indians. Characteristics of the American Indian population in California, including measures of economic well-being, depend on whether we choose to include multiracial American Indians, who tend to be better educated and have higher wages than monoracial American Indians. The ability to choose more than one race has made it very difficult to study changes over time for the American Indian population of California.

Demographers have devised several alternative methods of bridging racial categories across



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censuses to address these counting problems. These methods range from counting multiracial people as fractions of persons for each race checked—for example, a black+white individual would add one-half to the black population and one-half to the white population—to counting multiracial people as whole individuals for each race checked (essentially double counting for biracial people). For purposes of civil rights monitoring and enforcement, the OMB (2002) has issued the following rules:

- Responses in the five single-race categories are not allocated.
- Responses that combine one minority race and white are allocated to the minority race.
- Responses that include two or more minority races are allocated as follows:
  - If the enforcement action is in response to a complaint, allocate to the race that the complainant alleges the discrimination was based on.
  - If the enforcement action requires assessing disparate impact or discriminatory patterns, analyze the patterns based on alternative allocations to each of the minority groups.

The ability to check more than one race also raises challenges in estimating population-based rates because people may be inconsistent in their use of biracial identities. Many social scientists and health researchers use census data to provide denominators in the calculation of race-specific rates—including birth rates, death rates, rates of morbidity, crime rates, and arrest rates. However, combining data from one set of data with census data can be problematic, especially for multiracial individuals for whom the reporting of racial identity may not be consistent (for a longer discussion, see Johnson and Hayes, 2004). For example, estimates of fertility for multiracial women vary depending on the datasets used. Administrative data from California birth records suggest that AIAN+white women have substantially higher fertility rates than whites. These rates are derived from a single data source and therefore do not involve inconsistent measures of race between numerators and denominators. Estimates of fertility are very different, however, when we combine birth records with census data to estimate total fertility rates in California. These results suggest that AIAN+white women in California have astonishingly low levels of fertility, with a total fertility rate of 1.0 (lower than the total fertility rate for women in any country in the world). Of course, both results cannot be correct. It is probable that many women who identified as AIAN+white on Census 2000 did not identify themselves that way when they

**Table 6. Race and Ethnicity Alone and in Multiracial Combinations, Census 2000**

| | Non-Hispanic | Hispanic |
|---|---|---|
| White alone | 15,816,790 | 4,353,269 |
| White alone and in combination | 16,538,491 | 4,952,482 |
| Black alone | 2,181,926 | 81,956 |
| Black alone and in combination | 2,370,367 | 142,674 |
| Asian alone | 3,648,860 | 48,653 |
| Asian alone and in combination | 4,030,025 | 125,660 |
| AIAN alone | 178,984 | 154,362 |
| AIAN alone and in combination | 383,197 | 244,365 |
| SOR alone | 71,681 | 5,610,560 |
| SOR alone and in combination | 368,168 | 6,207,457 |

Source: Census 2000 SF1, Tables P8 and P10.



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gave birth in California. Thus, combining administrative data on births with census data on populations understates fertility rates for this group. Similarly, death rates based on administrative vital records on deaths and census counts are unrealistically low for multiracial populations, with too few death records identifying individuals as multiracial relative to census counts.

## Conclusion

There are two extreme views of the future of racial categorization in the United States. In one view, racial categories would no longer exist—the Census Bureau and other government agencies would cease to collect and disseminate data on the basis of race. Proponents of this view argue that racial categorization has no scientific basis and serves only to promote divisive identity politics. In California, this view of the future was put to the voters in a statewide proposition that the voters rejected in 2003. In the other extreme view, there will be an ever-expanding list of groups seeking and gaining inclusion in the federal statistical system (Prewitt, 2002). Census 2000, the first ever to allow respondents to identify as being of more than one race, could be seen as a step toward this second future.

Race still matters in California. In particular, the economic divide between blacks and whites, while narrowing, is still large. With respect to wages, for example, blacks still earn significantly less than whites even after controlling for age, education, and occupation (Reed and Cheng, 2003). Nonetheless, in the post civil rights era, racial disparities have been reduced. The collection of racial data by government agencies has allowed us to measure this improvement. Indeed, the Supreme Court has affirmed the salience of these racial categories, and census results show that the vast majority of Californians identify with a single race. OMB has issued guidelines for civil rights monitoring that largely rely on monoracial categories.

Over time, it is hard to project what might happen to the multiracial population—will it lead to a new multiracial identity that is distinct from underlying monoracial component groups? One certainty is that racial categories will change. Since 1790, no more than three consecutive censuses have used the same racial categories. As census categories and OMB requirements change, other agencies that collect data will also change their racial reporting requirements.

Our reading of Census 2000 results suggests that monoracial categories are alive and well, at least for the time being. Despite increasing diversity and intermarriage, only 5 percent of Californians were identified as multiracial. However, as individuals become more familiar with their choices in identifying their races, they may become more likely to use the option to pick more than one. Furthermore, the mere presence of these new racial-choice options may increase interest in racial heritage and ancestry. Certainly, continued increases in intermarriage and births to parents of different races could greatly expand the number of multiracial children over time. As their numbers increase, a greater proportion of young people born to parents of different races may choose to retain a multiracial identity as they grow older. It is possible, however, that the proportion of the population identified as being of more than one race could decrease with time. Census questions on race and ethnicity could revert back to their earlier one-race options. Furthermore, future state propositions could be successful in limiting the state's options to collect race data. Only the future will tell how rapidly the population who identifies as multiracial will grow, and whether it will coalesce into a more uniform identity shared across particular racial combinations.◆

**Our reading of Census 2000 results suggests that monoracial categories are alive and well, at least for the time being.**



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## Notes

[1] This issue of *California Counts* is part of a larger research effort examining the multiracial population of the United States (Tafoya, Johnson, and Hill, 2004) and the multiracial identity of children (Johnson, Hill, and Tafoya, 2004).

[2] Collection of data on Americans of Hispanic ethnicity is required to fulfill the obligations of Public Law 94-311, which was passed in 1976 to remedy discrimination against those of Hispanic origin.

[3] The rule employed by the Census Bureau is that if at least 90 percent of an ethnic group identifies with a single race, any who indicate an ethnicity only, without a race, may be recoded to the race used by 90 percent of that ethnic group. For example, a write-in response of "Jamaican" would be coded as black or African American because 90 percent of Jamaicans identify as black, and a response of "Mexican" would be coded as Some Other Race because fewer than 90 percent of Mexicans identify as white. This rule explains the preponderance of Hispanics in the SOR category, a topic to be addressed below.

[4] The relative youth of the multiracial population raises an important caveat about census data collection. Data are collected by household. Generally one person in each home provides information on all household members. Usually a parent, and more than likely a mother, completes the census form for minors in the household (Sweet, 1994). In this analysis, it is impossible to know whether the child perceives himself or herself in the same way he or she is perceived by the adult respondent charged with providing the information.

[5] The census calculates poverty rates for families. The rates reported in the figure reflect family-level poverty rates assigned to individuals.

[6] These findings exclude noncitizens and controlled for the age, education level, and nativity of respondents. The regression has indicator variables for each monoracial group and each multiracial combination (mixed-race black, mixed-race Asian, etc.).

[7] These findings exclude those who are not registered, and control for age, education level, and nativity of respondents. The regression has indicator variables for each monoracial group and each multiracial combination (mixed-race black, mixed-race Asian, etc.).

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